



HAXBY ROAD ROWNTREE WALK

FROM
CHOCOLATE
COMES CHANGE

4

Haxby Road walk

This walk reveals the area around the former Rowntree factory (today Nestlé York) towards the North East side of the city. It begins at the site of the old Rowntree Halt. And on a good day you'll enjoy a most distinctive element of York's Rowntree history—its delicious confectionery aromas that bring back many a nostalgic memory to local residents.

Duration

1 Hour
(from city centre)

Calories

(in KitKat fingers)
2 fingers

To reach the start of the walk take the bus or walk from Exhibition Square by the Art Gallery. Take bus number 1 or 5 to the Haxby Road stop, or if walking, go along Gillygate and Clarence Street, then Haxby Road. From the Haxby Road bus stop walk toward the old Chocolate Factory site. As you approach the bridge over the modern day cycle track briefly divert down Hambleton Terrace and stop by the blue railing.

Rowntree Halt

The opening of the Foss Islands rail line in 1879 connecting the Scarborough Line to the power station at Foss Islands made the land to the north of it an attractive site for the Rowntree Company. In 1895 Rowntree's bought its first locomotive and had one-and-a-half miles of standard gauge track laid.

As the factory grew a halt was constructed in 1927 at Hambleton Terrace. It was called Rowntree Halt and enabled workers from Selby and Doncaster to commute to the factory. The Halt closed on the 8th July 1987 and tracks were lifted by 1992. Even today a number of abandoned platforms are still visible and incorporated into the present factory architecture (No public access)

Imagine

The start of the day and thousands of workers spilling off the train.

Link to next place

Back on **Haxby Road** continue a little further along and **pause at the bus stop** beside the old factory entrance marked by a clock.

Chocolate Factory buildings

In 1890 Joseph Rowntree bought 29 acres of land on this site and built a state-of-the-art industrial complex similar to one that had earlier been developed in Birmingham for Cadbury's at Bournville. A few years later an additional 31 acres were purchased as the factory expanded.

By 1907 all the company's production had moved here from the original Tanner's Moat site (see [City Centre walk](#)). By 1920 the factory employed 6,000 people.

The carefully landscaped setting, with ornamental planting and handsome clocks at the site entrances, attest to the Rowntree philosophy of providing an attractive environment for employees.

Under the direction of Joseph and his son Seebohm the factory played a huge role in pioneering the development of employee benefits and working conditions. These achieved national and international attention as a model employer (even as far away as in Japan, where Seebohm had a reputation). The factory was also regarded as a sort of '*laboratory*' for good business management.

Today the production of some lines of chocolate continues by Nestlé on the same site that is covered in this walk and today York is the heart of the company's confectionery research worldwide.

Imagine

In wartime the 9 feet high '*Rowntree*' letters on the factory made from engineering bricks on a glazed cream brick background were painted out in order to prevent aerial identification.

Chocolate fact

The buildings were popularly known by their functions—such as the Elect Block, Melangeur Block, Almond Block, Cream Block, and Cake Department. There were interconnecting tunnels and cellars beneath these, two floors below ground level.

Look out for

The original buildings (such as the first factory building on your left, now disused) were designed by architect Fred Rowntree in 1904, and considered very advanced for their prototype steel-frame design. Seven storeys high, they were known locally as the '*skyscraper*'.

Link to next place

When you reach the **bus shelter**, **look over the road** towards the **Nuffield Hospital**.

Dining Block, today Nuffield Hospital

From the York Press, 4 June 1913: *'Today was an important one for Messrs Rowntree and Co Ltd...The ground floor was to be mainly devoted to scholastic work. On the north side were the woodwork, science, and other rooms planned as the boys' classes, the lecture and concert room, and two girls' dressmaking classrooms. The central portion comprised two cookery classrooms, and club rooms for men and boys. The south side would be devoted to the gymnasium and baths. Adjoining the boys' gymnasium were six sets of shower and foot baths, and a dressing room. The girls' gymnasium had a large dressing room with twenty porcelain slipper baths. The whole of the first floor was to be devoted to a dining room for girls. The men's dining room was on the north side of the second floor.'* (No public access)

Imagine 🍄

Beneath you the cavernous subway that once connected the factory with the dining facilities and the echoing clatter of feet as employees went on their lunch breaks.

Link to next place 🔗

Note the small **Arts and Crafts style building** on the street situated **between the two factory gates**.

Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library

Joseph Rowntree started a library for employees in 1885 by donating £10 of his own money, raising £10 from another source, and docking a penny a week from workers' pay.

The Memorial Library to commemorate its founder was planned after Joseph's death in 1925 and opened in 1927. It was designed by architect Fred Rowntree. It is a Grade II listed building.



Imagine

The scope of the library: *'Supposing all the books in this library were piled up one on top of another, they would reach to a height of eight times the Elet Block. The task of reading every book ... at the rate of two volumes per week would occupy 996 years.'* (Cocoa Works Magazine 1930).

Look out for

The name plaque above the doorway.

Link to next place

Look at the **building on the opposite side of the road**.

Joseph Rowntree Theatre

The Joseph Rowntree Theatre was designed by the architect Barry Parker who was a favoured architect of the Rowntrees, and paid for by one of the Rowntree Trusts. It was opened in November 1935 by Seebohm Rowntree, then Company Chairman, with the aim of *'providing a hall which may be a fitting centre for those recreational and educational activities which make for a full and happy life'*. Like the library it is Grade II listed for its historical significance.

Imagine

How the simple architectural features, combined with a warm colour scheme and hidden lighting, were all designed to give an intimate and welcoming atmosphere to the 450-seat auditorium.

Apart from a period during the Second World War, the theatre has been in constant use for the enjoyment of the public. The theatre is run by volunteers so it is closed between performances—all the more reason to book up for something so you get to see the interior (information on programmes at the York Theatre Royal).

Link to next place

Carefully **cross the road** and head towards **Yearsley swimming baths**. Note in passing the distinctive Gothic detailing of the house on the corner that belonged to Samuel Haley, York's Chief Constable (1862-88).

Yearsley swimming baths

Originally an open air swimming baths for the Company, this building was also designed by Fred Rowntree. It was presented to the city of York by Joseph Rowntree for public access on 4th May 1909. *'Length 150 feet, width 50 feet, depth from 3 feet to 6 feet 9 inches, capacity 250,000 gallons of water, supplied by the York Waterworks. Ladies Days, Monday 1p.m. to close. Free admission is a condition of Mr Joseph Rowntree's gift; this is a great boon to the boys and girls of York who attend in hundreds.'* The roof was added in 1965. Today it remains as the only 50-yard pool in the north of England, a gem of Edwardian architecture.

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Look out for 🔍

On the exterior wall (the wall facing the factory) look for the inscription and date of foundation, 1909.

Imagine 🗨️

The previous baths, '*Old Yearsley Bathing Place*' (pictured below) constructed in 1860 in the River Foss, and situated a short distance below Yearsly Bridge. The bed of the river was cemented for a space of 100 yards, and dressing sheds erected: total cost about £300. Admission Free.

Chocolate fact 🐟

Until very recently the pool was heated from the excess steam from the power plant at the factory.



Link to next place 🔗

Cross the road to look at the **war memorial** on the factory exterior. This replaced a collection of older rolls of honour and two carved wooden memorials on display at the factory when this part of the site was in use.

Rowntree war memorial

Joseph Rowntree's reaction to the outbreak of the First World War was a fear of jingoism and a concern for the reconstruction of society, a wish to improve present conditions in order to improve the welfare of the population into the future.

Seebom Rowntree served as Director of the Welfare Department at the Ministry of Munitions at the behest of David Lloyd George. He worked on the implementation of the principles of '*scientific management*' in the munitions factories and safeguarding the well-being of factory workers. In 1916 Rowntree was appointed to the government's Reconstruction Committee.

Rowntree's workers took a keen interest in raising money and making parcels to be sent to the 'lads at the front' or given to wounded soldiers. The following is a list of items purchased by the Cocoa Works Wounded Soldiers Collection Fund in one month in 1915:

- 300 packets of woodbines (cigarettes) • 24 packets of Gold Flake (cigarettes) • 80 (1/2 oz) packets of tobacco • 144 clay pipes
- 144 boxes of matches • 14/- worth halfpenny stamps (3 packets)
- Stamped envelopes (69) • 12 lbs Whipped creams • 12 lbs Cracknels
- 16 lbs Norway gums • 9 lbs Best wastes • 11 lbs Venetian creams
- 42 lbs Plums • 42 lbs Cooking apples • 14 lbs Eating apples.

Imagine

How the factory in the Second World War was affected by restrictions on sugar imports and rationing. Much of the office block was converted for use by the Royal Army Pay Corps. The cream department was reconfigured for the production of munitions, Ryvita, dried egg, powdered milk and chocolate rations, while the Smarties Block was converted into a secret fuse factory, named County Industries.

Chocolate fact

Girls who were employed in munitions wore protective make-up against TNT. They were known as the '*canary girls*' because of their yellow appearance caused by the work.

Nestlé York

In 1969 the company merged to become Rowntree Macintosh Ltd. In 1988 the company was bought out by the Swiss giant Nestlé. It is today the largest employer in York.

Imagine

That generations of multiple family employees have worked at the factory since the 1890s, and one family can even claim a continuity back to the 1860s.

Chocolate fact

KitKat was an original Rowntree product developed in 1935 as '*a chocolate bar that a man could take to work in his pack-up*'. Today five million a day and one billion KitKats a year are made at this plant.

Link to next place

Keep walking onwards and **past the main entrance to the factory** and at the next entrance peep at the **Product Technology Centre Confectionery**—the science lab of future sweets! (No public access) Continue **down the Haxby Road** to see the **Rowntree sports fields** on your right.

Rowntree Sports fields

The company's original 57-acre sports park includes playing fields, a bowling green, tennis courts and allotments. It is now owned by York St John University.

Link

You can choose to end your walk here. Retrace your steps or take a bus back into town. Or else **carry on along Haxby Road towards New Earswick**. It will take about 20 minutes on foot. Or just jump on a bus and alight at the **Folk Hall**.

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